1: Kroeber E-5 (1901) 1908
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SOCIAL CUSTOMS.

The Gros Ventre system of terms of relationship has been given in a former publication.[1]

Cousins, so far as the relationship was known, were called brothers and sisters, and they called each other's children son or daughter if the cousin was of the same sex as the speaker, or nephew or niece if the cousin was of the opposite sex. Any known relationship was a bar to marriage. The brother of a dead man sometimes married his widow, but this was not always the case.

Large amounts of property, especially horses, were given away for wives for the honor of the act, but there was no rule or definite custom covering the quantity of property so given. The horses might be given not only to the father, but to the brothers, uncles, and other relatives of the girl. Sometimes, without having received any gifts and apparently without any previous understanding, a man would give his daughter to a young man, who thereupon would give him horses, or distribute them among his wife's other relatives. Old men practised this custom in order to obtain the aid and services of a young man in caring for their horses and in other ways, and no doubt sometimes also to insure a more certain food-supply. A young man on marrying received a tent with all the proper furniture, usually from his prospective parents-in-law, but sometimes from his own parents, if they were the wealthier.

Although a young married man often lived with his father-in-law, the well-known taboo custom between mother-in-law and son-in-law — which forbade their speaking, looking at each other, or being in the same tent — existed among the Gros Ventre. There was, however, no father-in-law taboo. The mother-in-law taboo extended to the son-in-law's brother.

If a woman did not wish a man for her lover, she might send him to do a certain act of bravery. If he returned successfully from war, having accomplished the deed, he was then accepted. This custom is said to have led to the death of many young men.

At a person's death his property was inherited generally by his relatives. His father and mother, brothers, sisters, and children would receive part. His father and mother received the most. A man often disposed of his property before his death. If he died suddenly, as on being killed in war, his parents divided his property. It was not customary for a man on going to war to divide his property among his relatives in the contingency of his death. Property particularly valued by the dead person was buried with him.

[1] Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XVIII, Part I, pp. 9, 150.

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A wife inherited practically nothing from her husband. If she had been faithful to him and had been of a good disposition, her parents-in-law might give her a certain number of horses or other property. The tent was considered the woman's possession while she lived with her husband; but on his death, even this was no longer her property. If the tent was worth keeping at all, it generally went to the dead man's sister, if she was newly married. A man, on the contrary, inherited his wife's property, though he generally gave back part of it to her relatives.

A woman, on her husband's death, went back to live with her parents, or, if these were dead, with her brother, uncle, or other relative. An old woman, on the death of her husband, generally went to live with her children, most frequently with a daughter.

On the death of a brother, especially a beloved one, or of his father or his son, a man cut his hair and went out naked (with only a buffalo robe) on the prairie to cry from morning until late at night. Women, besides cutting their hair, and cutting themselves (especially on the leg) until they bled, would also go out to cry, naked from the waist up. A sister cut herself for a brother, but a mother mourning for a child underwent the most pain. Of course the mourning was greatest for an only child. In such a case, parents might give away everything in their tent and nearly all their horses, stripping themselves of property so thoroughly as almost to go naked. Some mourners fasted for a number of days. If, while a person was crying on the prairie, one should in joke attempt to scare him, he might kill the disturber. Mourners were the bravest people in war, caring about no danger whatever.

Burial was in trees, on high rocks, or in caves inaccessible to wolves and coyotes. The corpse was wrapped in a burial robe.

A menstruating woman was called niniitixtj. It is said that she did not retire to a separate lodge, or eat separately from her family; but she did not approach a sick patient, because of the evil effect she would have on his condition by her presence. Some women were said to wear a breech-cloth during their menstruation.

In childbirth, women either lay or knelt. They grasped a stick supported in a horizontal position by two upright forked sticks set in the ground. After the umbilical cord had been severed, the end was left on the child. It was thought to fall off on the fourth day. The woman who had cut the umbilical cord received as a gift the knife she had used. A woman who washed a new-born child was given the vessel in which it was washed. The afterbirth was hung in a tree. If it were left lying to be handled, the child would be afflicted with sores. For three or four days after birth, the child was given suck by other women than its mother. This statement apparently refers chiefly to a woman's first child.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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taboo. This was the case regarding the children of "inseparable friends," but whether or not it was so regarding the children of all members of the company, mutual hospitality was frequently extended among the members—"a man would most often invite the members of his age group." Further, it was not unusual for members of the same company to go hunting and on raiding and revenge parties together. If a young man were killed at war and his body brought home, the members of his company were said to have assembled and danced around his bier, sometimes sobbing and crying as they danced.

As members of either one or other of the two larger societies they joined with members of other companies, in the Stars and Wolf-men respectively, to perform their proper social dance and to participate in activities such as gambling, horse-racing, "bragging contests," and so on, wherein they could compete with members of the opposite moiety. An individual seemingly tended to choose his serious enemy-friends from among those of the rival organization and thus is explained the spirit of competition which Kroeber notes between the Stars and "other companies." [18]

The Societies

The Stars and Wolf-men societies were organized along identical lines and were distinguished from each other only in details of procedure.

Each society included approximately half the total number of able-bodied warriors in the tribe. They each had two renowned men as leaders—two Star leaders of relatively recent times having been Comes A-flying and Crazy Bull; two Wolf-men leaders, Skinner and Strikes On Top. The leaders remained mounted when the others of the society were marching on foot in preparation for their dance, and carried whips at the dance as insignia. These men were supposed to have been outstanding warriors who had while mounted actually counted coup against the enemy. Two members of the last-admitted company served as *atsa'an* (waiters, messengers) at the dances, and each society had an announcer, presumably chosen from among the "old men" who had gone through the Law Enforcer Dance.

[18] Kroeber, 1908, p. 234.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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posed to be watched over and kept under close supervision. For her there was much less freedom than for a boy of like age.

As a rare treat, a girl of eight or nine might have been allowed to stay with a friend of her own age overnight, providing her guardian knew exactly where she was and that there was some responsible party to look after her. Boys of the same age and even younger could come and go more or less as they pleased. In illustration Al Chandler told of an incident in his childhood. "At the death of my uncle, the corpse was placed in a lodge removed at some distance from where he resided. I was only a little fellow at the time and I wandered over to that lodge. Not realizing my uncle was dead, I crawled under the covers. I was not missed from home and was not discovered until the next morning when my grandfather came to the lodge to mourn. Thereafter for a week or so my grandmother watched me when I set off from home, but when she saw I was steering clear of that particular lodge, she allowed me to go without saying anything. She knew I could take care of myself so she didn't care where I went or when I came home."

In spite of strict supervision of girls, sometimes they evaded their guardians. Coming Daylight told of one of the "tricks" that she had used. "One night I heard there was dancing and my sister and I wanted to sneak out to enjoy the fun while my grandmother was sleeping. We rolled up our blankets and put them beside her. Fortunately she didn't awaken even when we came in. If she had known we were out she would have come after us and given us a good lecture when we got home."

So far as training in domestic tasks is concerned, it was considered an important part of a girl's duty to gather berries and to dig roots. Some older woman went with a group of girls to show them what to collect, pointing out at the same time the things that were not edible. Each girl worked and whatever she garnered would be given by her to her mother or grandmother. What was not used immediately would then be stored for winter use.

Learning to slice meat very thin for drying seemed to have been picked up easily by girls at playing "house." Skinning and butchering were much more difficult tasks which had to be learned carefully. These were considered mainly work for men, but it

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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183 867 was not a Christian, used to tell him: "You have eyes to see, a heart to think, and ears to hear. Listen to what I will tell you. You are a poor boy. As such, be faithful. Believe in the One Above the White Man. Pray to Him, ask Him to have pity on you and so make you a good man some day. Try to be good to all, especially when you become a man. Be good to the poor, be good to the old. Never take anything not belonging to you. Never [865] speak evil of other people. Try to be patient. If a man says anything wrong to you, and hurts your feelings, say nothing because if folks talk back it causes quarreling or fighting, which is not good. If a poor man asks you for anything, if you have it, be ready to hand it over to him. If you see anybody hungry and [888] you have it, feed him. If an old man or woman is in need and wants anything done, do it for him or her. If you do these things, the One Above will have pity on you."

685 867 183 All informants agreed that in addition to having been told to take care of whatever property they might have, they were instructed to regard the property rights of others. It was believed that, though the theft remained undiscovered, the thief would be punished by automatic supernatural sanction. "Something terrible would happen to anybody who stole something." Mary's grandmother, for instance, had told her time and again never to take anything that did not belong to her. To illustrate how well this had been instilled into her, she gave the following example. "On one occasion when I was a child, I found a really beautiful string of beads, but I did not take it. After I got to bed that night, however, I told my grandmother about it. When asked why I had failed to bring home the beads, I replied: 'I was afraid you would tell me that I had taken them from someone.' My grandmother merely remarked: 'Well, you should have brought them to me, or better, you should have taken me to where they were lying.' But when I took her to the spot the next day the beads were gone."

[764] This reminded Coming Daylight of an incident in her own childhood. "I was walking near a grove of trees where several corpses had been placed (in the traditional manner of disposing of the dead). I noticed a considerable amount of bear excrement and mixed in it were a number of elk teeth—the most valuable

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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763 property.[4] Although in the following case ideal conditions did not obtain, the account as given by an old woman illustrates something of the attitudes which prevailed even after the Gros Ventres had settled down. "My husband had been ill. We were very badly off, having nothing to eat and no light, but worst of all my husband had no suitable clothes in which to pass his last moments. A friend of his fortunately came to the rescue, bringing new clothes, food, a fancy new lamp and fuel. A short time after this my husband called to me to come to him and said: 'I have lost life long ago. The only thing I have left is my eyesight. I can see, but I will be leaving you soon. Bring me the bundle my friend has given me.' I did so and as he examined the new clothing piece by piece he said: 'Now I am glad I shall have something to wear. I want you to listen carefully. I don't want you to mourn—we have too many children for that, and they must be cared for. Don't go to your relatives nor to mine. We have been very poor since I have been sick and none of them has even come to see us. I want you to go straight to the home of this man who has given me these clothes. Now I am ready to go.' After my husband [587] died, I did just as he had requested. In spite of all the gossip, I married that man. People were talking about me because that man had at one time been married to a wife of my mother's brother."

764 If circumstances did not permit arrangements to be made before death, as soon as possible after death the corpse was washed and dressed. This office was performed preferably by friends of the [572] deceased since it was not expected of near relatives because "they felt too bad." Should the deceased not own a proper outfit, one was usually somehow provided. Coming Daylight remembered that one time when a small boy was drowned, the child's distracted mother came running to her lodge saying: "I am very poor and my little boy has no good clothes to wear. Will you let me have your little boy's clothes?" Coming Daylight felt so sorry for this woman that she let her have her own son's nicely beaded clothes and moccasins, and gave her a blanket as well. After the body was dressed, they laid it on this blanket in the place of honor at the back of the parents' lodge.

[4] Kroeber, 1908, p. 180, notes that "A man often disposed of his property before death."

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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Another instance was given by The Boy regarding his father. "Lame Bull was on a buffalo-hunting party when his brother-in-law was killed during an encounter with the enemy. They brought the body as it was back to camp, where it lay for quite a while. Lame Bull finally went to his tipi and got leggings and a shirt of his own, although he was Flat Pipe Keeper at the time and it was taboo for one holding this office to give his clothes to the dead. Nevertheless Lame Bull removed the bloody clothes from the body of his brother-in-law, washed the body and dressed it in his own clothes. He paid for this kindness, however, because for nine years thereafter he had such pains in his legs he was not able to walk,—this being the punishment he suffered for breaking the rules by which the Keeper of a sacred pipe should live."

Before finally disposing of the body "something very expensive," like a big silk handkerchief, was placed over the face. The whole body, including the head, was then wrapped securely in a blanket or robe and tied "like a mummy." The body was placed on a stretcher and put in a forked tree, if practicable, the head to the setting sun. Otherwise the corpse might be laid on a knoll and a structure like a sweatlodge built over it to protect it from the wild beasts; or it might be laid in the cleft of a cliff and covered with rocks.[8] For a particularly prominent man, however, his own lodge might serve as his last resting place. In that case holes would be dug in which the lodge-poles were placed, in order that the structure would be more permanent. The body was laid in the lodge amidst rich furnishings. The ears of the lodge were closed, the cover pegged down, and the whole secured as well as possible. This was done, for instance, for The Boy's maternal grandfather and for one of his maternal uncles. Al Chandler remembers that when he himself was a small boy upon the death of his uncle, Rises Again, the body was placed on a bedstead in a big lodge erected about a half-mile from his house.

Even in times of great stress, such as in a smallpox epidemic when so many died that "the trees along the Milk River were just loaded with bodies," as much care as possible was taken to place the bodies properly in their last resting place. When there was no more space on the trees, a large number of bodies were put in a

[8] Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 181.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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lodge at some little distance from the camp. As exceptions to the rule, however, Coming Daylight told of a couple of instances which came within her experience in the first epidemic which she remembers. One case concerned a man who simply left the body of one of his wives where she had fallen and Coming Daylight came across the bones of that woman stripped of flesh by wild animals during the night. The other case was that of a man who mercilessly covered with stones the body of his infected sister, in spite of the fact that she was still alive.

Only in relatively recent times has burial in the ground been common. This is illustrated by the comments of Coming Daylight in connection with a long story about a visit to a relative who was married to a white trader. "On this occasion my father's father was killed and scalped by the Piegan just outside of the white man's stockade. The white men brought in the body. He had been scalped and was bloody all over. These whites washed him, bound up his head, and dressed his body in their own clothes,—even to putting shoes on his feet. We thought that peculiar and some of our relatives wanted instead to put on him the best pair of beaded moccasins we had. My father said, however, that he wouldn't interfere as long as they were fixing him up in their way. So the whites buried him just like they do their own. The Gros Ventres never did that—they put the corpse up high somewhere, usually in a tree. We thought it was bad enough for our relatives to die, much less covering them up with earth. My maternal grandmother, who was there at the time, said: 'When I leave you, I don't want you to mourn for me because I have lived to be just as old as anyone should be. All I ask is that you see to it that I am fixed up the right way. Don't let them dig any hole for me. I want you to lay me up in a cliff in a nice quiet place, just make a bed for me and lay me there.' When she died, that is just what was done for her."

It was customary, prior to the time that the Gros Ventres settled down, to place some of the personal belongings of the deceased with the body.[6] When a beloved son died, for instance, his favorite horse might be taken along and killed at the place where the body was laid away. Similarly a minor pipe might have been

[6] Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 180.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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buried with its owner. For a woman, her clothing, and sometimes even her pots and pans, were put with her body. It was stated explicitly, however, that food was never placed with the body by the Gros Ventres, although it was recognized that the Assiniboine did so. 764

A widow would burn the things of her husband which were not placed with his body nor taken by his relatives. She would then be smudged with sage and, should she have kissed the corpse, her mouth was smudged four times and she was made to spit each time. 768 783

These practices were seemingly tied up with two beliefs,—the first being that if objects were not placed with the body, the deceased would return to look for the things valued in life; the second, that the recently deceased try to lure the living to join them. The first point was explained by Mary, whose mother had told her: "Everyone likes his own things and some hate to leave them when they die. That is why we used to put personal belongings with the corpse. It might be that there is some one thing that a person wants which has been 'left behind,' so he will come back to seek it. Sometimes when you are alone you might hear a rattling of the dishes or a whistling sound, and you would know that it was some loved one who had died and who was looking for something." 764 775

As proof of the second point, the following experience was offered by Singer. "When I was ill during a smallpox epidemic, I had a dream. I dreamed that my sister, who had died in this same epidemic, appeared to me and said: 'Our mother wants you. Come with me.' My father, who was actually nursing me, seemed to be standing to one side. He told my sister: 'You have had no pity on us. You didn't fight for life. What are you coming after her for? You go by yourself.' But pretty soon my sister came again and said: 'Now this time I want you to come because our mother wants you.' So I agreed: 'All right. I will go with you.' My sister took me to a shabby-looking little old lodge and I didn't feel right about going in there but I thought: 'Well, to please them I will look in there anyway.' There was someone there in bed and my sister was toward the back of the lodge and my mother was on the other side. My mother told me: 'Here, sit by your sister.' She 775 787

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
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war, wealth, curing, gambling, and sex. The helper imparted no power of clairvoyance or prophecy; the other lesser beings did impart one or other of the specific powers above listed. The helper had to be summoned to come in person on each occasion when needed; the other beings gave power once for all to the receiver and were not, at least not ordinarily, summoned to come in person when the imparted power was exercised. The helper was always a deceased relative of the helped; the power-giver was a non-ancestral being. The helper was not acquired by quest, he more or less forced his services on the recipient, and was not transferable; personal power was commonly (although not always) acquired by quest, was accepted or refused freely, and was more commonly transferable.

Our chief sources of information upon personal ancestral helpers and personal supernatural powers were: among the men, The Boy, Thick, Al Chandler, Thomas Main, Turn Toes; among the women, Coming Daylight, Singer, Garter Snake, Mary Ereaux, Cora Chandler. Their competence will, we believe, become clear from the circumstances to be noted passim in the present section.

Ancestral Helpers

The ancestral helper complex among the Gros Ventres has been recorded in detail by us in two papers published in 1944,[1] to which the reader is referred. The following account is a summarized version of these two papers.

The ancestral or ghost helper was called tsätsuwa'a,[2] of uncertain etymology. The word was used exclusively for such ancestral helpers, as distinct from other ghosts (see p. 23).

Such a ghost helper was acquired, not by quest through fasting or crying, as power was more commonly acquired. Acquisition usually came about as follows. A man or woman would keep some momento of a deceased close relative, such as some prized possession or else a rib or tooth[3] or lock of hair of the deceased,—either in

[1] Flannery, 1944, pp. 54-59; Cooper, 1944, pp. 80-84.

[2] This same word is used by the Gros Ventres at present for "radio."

[3] After the body had decomposed. Formerly the Gros Ventres did not bury the dead in the ground, cf. Flannery, 1953, p. 211.

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764]

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
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He borrowed a saddle from us and he isn't here.' Mrs. Stevens had a store at Old Hays and they had come over and she said she had plums canned. So she went right home to get them for him. It didn't take long in an auto and she brought a jar of them. He certainly enjoyed them. 755

"So Little Man got back and I came after him and told him that Jimmy was sick again. He came over and looked at him and doctored a little bit like he does at first. He doctored him twice that same day and the next morning was when he used that bear claw. He told Jimmy: 'Tell me wherever it hurts and I will work on it.' Jimmy said: 'Here on my right side.' The old man said: 'That's a bad place. I don't like to suck there because it might hurt your guts. But I will do something else. I will use this bear claw now.' So he asked the boy, showing him the bear claw, 'Do you think you can stand this?' Jimmy said he could and Little Man said: 'Well make sure you can stand it.' He told the old lady to hold Jimmy's hands down and me to hold his feet down. But first he told me to get hot coals and just put a little of the sweet pine on the coals and smudge the end of the bear claw. He took some paint and painted himself like the bear had showed him that time when he was out crying. So after he did that, I held Jimmy and the old man sang first himself. He sang that song four times and then got busy. He put the claw right where it should be, and you could just see the claw going in. The boy wriggled and made faces. The claw went right in at the side and he jerked it out and you could hear something drop. I saw where it dropped and said: 'Where did it fall?' Little Man told me: 'Pick it up. Let us see it.' I took it and gave it to him. He worked it around in his palm. It was a whole cherry seed and Jimmy's gut, kind of rotten, was stuck on it and that is what was blocking his gut. Right after that he was well.

"The claw was a big one but it didn't even make a scar because I looked to see if there was any blood coming out. As soon as he jerked the claw out, he rubbed his hand just a little bit over the place and that is all there was to it."

Al Chandler also gave a short account of his own treatment as a boy by Black Bird.

"I was four years old when my mother died and I knew in what direction they had taken the corpse. The next morning I went over [764]

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
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755 there and saw two fresh graves. They dig a hole about three or four feet deep and put sticks across, cover that with canvas and [764] cover the canvas with dirt. I laid down on one of the graves and that is where they found me. When I did not come back my father started looking for me. I was just like dead and they got an old medicine man to work on me, for at that time my adopted father, Little Man, had not yet gotten doctoring power.

"When I woke up, my father, my stepfather (the man married to my real mother), a woman and the old doctor, Black Bird, were there in this big lodge. I did not know what had happened to me but when I woke up I saw old Black Bird sitting by me. He had a china saucer with medicine in it and with four little brass bells [sic] in the medicine. He told me to drink up the medicine. I took the medicine but tried to balk at the bells. But the old man said: 'No, no drink the bells and all. The bells will be your protection. You will never get sick and ghosts will no longer be able to harm you. You could go to sleep with them and sit up with them [without harm to you from them]."

In a long narrative of a battle between the Gros Ventres and the Crow, The Boy described, very briefly, the manner in which one of the Gros Ventres was cured. After the fighting was over this man was found unconscious, bleeding from a wound in the arm. One of the Gros Ventres knew how to staunch the flow of blood He had an otter-skin with medicine tied on the nose thereof. With this he treated the wounded man's arm. The flow of blood stopped at once and the man regained consciousness. A travois was made and they had the man's relatives haul him back to the main camp on it.

756 A number of other individuals with doctoring power were mentioned by name at various times by our informants—Sleeping Bear, He Steals, Bill Jones, Ragged Robe (d. about 1935), Otter Robe, Joe Assiniboine—but we obtained no information on their [795] curing procedures. We knew Joe Assiniboine, who alone of the surviving Gros Ventres refused to the last to become a Catholic and who died only recently in 1942 or 1943, but unfortunately, though not patently unfriendly to us, was consistently reluctant to give information.

5: Flannery E-5 (1940)1944
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787 As to the way in which the power was acquired, Al Chandler
791 explained as follows: "It was customary to take some hair or a
764 relic of a deceased relative after the body decays. (The Gros Ventres did not use to bury their dead like they do now.) Some would have a bone, others a whole lock of hair, and so on. Now if a person happens to take something the spirit likes, the spirit appears and asks: 'Why do you want that rib (or whatever part one takes)?' The man or woman might answer: 'I want you real near me and I want you to help me whenever I ask you.' That person gets in a kind of trance while the spirit talks to him that first time, and the spirit gives him a particular song which he must sing when he wants to invite the spirit."

Apparently some leeway was allowed the individual in accepting the power, if the following information from Al Chandler can be taken as an indication.

"My adoptive father had the rib of an uncle of his who had been a medicine man of some kind. The spirit appeared to my father and asked: 'Why did you take that? What are you going to do with me?' My father replied: 'This is just for myself. I don't want to be the kind of person who owns spirits. If I need you myself I am going to call on you and I want you to help me, but I am not going to make you a public servant.' And that spirit did help him, personally, once or twice, but my father never got tied up in the ropes [as in the case reported by Mrs. Warrior]. By the way, the person who wants to find out something is the one that ties the spiritualist. He can tie the ropes as tight as he wants to and make as many knots as he pleases. The funny part of it is that it is just like the showmen with handcuffs,—the knots sometimes are still tied just like the person who wanted the information tied them originally,—although sometimes the spirit bunched the ropes all up in a mess. The whole tent shakes, too, and the skeptics look real hard, but the spirit will mock them by saying: 'Well, you need not look because you can't see anything anyway!'"

787 In conclusion I think we can say that the rite fits into the general ceremonial pattern of the Gros Ventres, but it was the only ceremony in which the shaking tent was involved. The